

WHEN STORIES ARE NOT TOLD

Focusing on Mental Health Service Providers for Migrants in Modern Italy

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Introduction

Many researches on patients' narratives in individual therapy (Good 1994, Kleinman 1988), family therapy (Andersen 1991, Anderson & Goolishian 1992, White & Epston 1990).

- Patients is a narrative subject.
- Its story is understandable.

But how about migrants/"refugees*" patients?

*In Italy, applicants for international protection are usually called "refugees".

Research Question

- ◆ When patients are migrants/”refugees”, what kind of challenges do therapists face and what do they realize from such experience?

Subjects and Methods

- ◆ Research conducted in Milan, Pisa, Rome in 2017 for 6 months.
- ◆ 43 mental health service providers are interviewed (30 psychologists and 13 psychiatrists).
- ◆ Participant observations at clinics, training schools for mental health service providers, related seminars.

Results



1. When stories are told in foreign languages...

- ◆ Mediators/interpreters support the communication between patient and therapist.
- ◆ Mediators/interpreters are not always available.
- ◆ It is necessary to evaluate the accuracy of translation.
- **It is hard to understand stories and to be confident of one's own understanding.**

2. When false stories are told...

- ◆ Cosimo was deceived by a malingerer assuming a false identity.
- ◆ Recognized refugee's stories are “recycled” within applicants for international protection.
- **Therapists must always keep in mind that false stories can be told.**

3. When stories are not completely told

- ◆ Ivo supposes that this patient keeps silent because he is a poor talker and also he tries to protect somebody.
- ◆ Anna surmises that her patient does not tell whole story because he does not remember a part of it and it is also very painful for him to talk about it.
- **Therapists can do nothing but imagine stories never told.**

Discussion



The challenges

- ◆ Stories are not told in the way therapists expect.
- ◆ Migrant patient is not always a narrative subject.
- ◆ Migrant's story is not always understandable.

Fundament of all understanding by Gadamer

When one tries to understand the content of what is being said, he/she expects that the content of what is being said is true and meaningful (Gadamer 2004:294).

No precondition for understanding

- ◆ When stories are told in foreign language, its correct understanding is not guaranteed.
- ◆ When false stories are told, an attempt itself of understanding fails.
- ◆ When stories are not told completely, one can only surmise what has not been said.
- **Therapists realize the lack of precondition of understanding and the need to recover it.**

When one fails to accept the
content of stories as truth and
meaningful...

One tries to understand
“psychologically or historically, as
another’s opinion”

(Gadamer 2002:294)

“Historical understanding” by Gadamer

An understanding based on narrator's historical aspects and hearer's historical aspects (Gadamer 2002:295).

- **Therapists may pay attention to the historical aspects of patients and themselves to be able to understand patients' stories.**

Conclusion



Conclusion

When stories are not told, it can be an opportunity for a deep understanding of not only patient but also him/herself through reevaluation of own history.

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